

**Struggle or go Down:
Youth Independence**

V. Chemodanov
1934 London: YCLGB
16p.

**STRUGGLE
OR —————
GO DOWN**

**THE RIGHT OF
YOUTH
INDEPENDENCE
IN THE FIGHT FOR
SOCIALISM**

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Issued by the British
Young Communist League

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1934

INTRODUCTION

THE questions dealt with in this little booklet are of particular interest to the Socialist Youth of Britain.

The first national organisation of Socialist Youth, the Socialist Young Guards of Belgium, was formed in 1886. In 1907 the first International Congress of Socialist Youth was held. It was not until 1922 that the first national organisation of rebel working-class youth—the Young Communist League—was formed in Great Britain.

The British Labour movement was represented at the first International Congress of Socialist Youth by an "observer." But cold water was consistently poured on the idea of independent organisation of the young workers.

The writings and speeches of such leaders as Karl Liebknecht, addressed to the youth, were kept from the British youth. News and material on the development and problems of the Socialist Youth movement on the Continent were also kept from them.

Because of this the British young workers know little about the history of the International Socialist Youth movement. In particular they know little of the long and bitter struggles of the Socialist youth for the autonomy of their organisations.

This question of the autonomy of the Socialist Youth organisations in relation to the parties is a burning one in Britain to-day.

The leaders of the Labour Party seek to keep the members of the Labour League of Youth under close

control by declaring that it is "not in any way a separate organisation, but an integral part of the Labour Party."

But everyone knows that Labour Youth are impatient of the restraint imposed on them and demand greater freedom of activity and organisation.

Faced with the dangers of war and Fascism and the offensive of the National Government, more and more of the Labour Youth feel they must play a part in a united militant struggle of the working youth. They feel themselves held back by leaders who say their "primary function is to foster interest in the party among young people," to "enable young people to be nurtured in the philosophy of Socialism," and "to enjoy fellowship in joint educational, recreational and social activities."

They demand ACTION, militant class struggle, working-class unity—and are given class collaboration, threats of disciplinary action and arbitrary removal of resolutions from Conference agendas on the grounds that they "conflict with specific decisions of the Labour Party."

In the I.L.P. Guild of Youth the situation is somewhat different.

The constitution of the I.L.P. Guild of Youth describes the Guild as "an autonomous organisation."

Exercising this autonomy, and backed by a special vote of a Party Conference, the Guild decided to affiliate conditionally to the Young Communist International as an organisation sympathetic to Communism.

Now the leaders of the I.L.P. say this decision is "incompatible with the Guild remaining the Youth Section of the I.L.P."

In other words, if the Guild uses its autonomy to take a decision not to the liking of the party leaders they can be cut off from the party.

Surely this is a mockery of autonomy!

It is often claimed against the Young Communist League that it is dominated by the Communist Party. Fenner Brockway, Secretary of the I.L.P., used this argument to prejudice Guilders against associating with the Communist Youth.

There is no truth in this statement.

In this pamphlet Comrade Chemodanov explains the real basis of the Communist attitude to the youth and to relations between Communist Parties and the Y.C.L.s, as laid down by Lenin.

It is further explained in the Programme of the Y.C.I. Our Programme states that the Y.C.L.s have their own autonomous organisations, elected bodies, wide autonomy and their own internal questions.

True, the Y.C.L. stands under the political leadership of the Communist Party. But the Communist Party encourages and does not stand in the way of the maximum revolutionary initiative of the youth. It is because of this that there is no such clash and disagreement between the Communist Youth and the Communist Party.

Struggle or Capitulation?

A DISCUSSION is taking place in the Second International and the Young Socialist International at the present time on the question of the relations between the youth and the older generation.

This discussion has great political importance *in principle* and has an *international* character. The socialist newspapers, however, gloss over the real content and significance of this discussion, and what they write on this matter shows that they have absolutely no understanding of the feelings and the processes which are taking place among the youth or that they do not want to understand them.

In France, for instance, some of the Socialists think that the dissensions between the Young Socialist organisations and the Socialist Party have arisen in conditions when the "closest solidarity" reigns between them.

Others are prone to imagine that the disagreements arose owing to a state of crisis in the Young Socialist organisation. But both of these are deeply mistaken when they begin to invent methods for liquidating these disagreements. The former, for instance, think that it is only necessary to give the youth the "right to study and discuss political problems" and to give certain "flexibility" to the *organisational* rules, and these disagreements will immediately disappear. The others, on the contrary, imagine that they can get rid of these disagreements if they manage "without coercion" to "firmly stick to the rules" and remind

the youth more frequently that "there cannot be a policy specially for the youth."

WHAT IS THE BASIC CAUSE OF THE DISAGREEMENTS?

In order to give a clear and correct reply to this question, we must remember on what basis, in what conditions and in what connection the question of the relations between the youth and the adults arose in the Second International and in the Young Socialist International.

It is our assertion that this question did not arise by any chance. It is not simply a matter of the youth demanding that certain amendments be made in the organisational rules and that certain concessions be made to them. These differences which have taken place in the past cannot be got rid of by amendments and concessions, nor can they be removed by a "rigid" application of the rules.

The discussion on the relations between the organisations of the youth and the party organisations in the Second International arose in conditions of the *sharpening* of the class struggle and internal imperialist contradictions.

The discussion arose and is developing in conditions of the extreme strivings of the toiling masses and therefore of the youth to unite their forces for a struggle against oppression and want, against Fascism and the danger of imperialist war.

The discussion arose in connection with the fact that in the struggle against Fascism and imperialist war considerable parts of the Socialist Youth were boldly approaching the Communist Youth, and were showing much *greater* activity than many of the parties of the Second International in the establishment of the united front.

It was precisely this which sharpened and laid bare the contradictions and the disagreements between the Young Socialist organisations and many of the parties in the Second International, and the disagreements in the Young Socialist International itself.

What is the essence of these contradictions and disagreements and what is their fundamental cause? The cause is that the policy of the leaders of the Second International and the majority in the Executive Committee of the Young Socialist International *does not correspond* to the growing political activity of the youth in the conditions of the class struggle on the chief political questions both in respect to the united front and in the fixing of the role of the youth in the class struggle.

THE REVOLUTIONARY YOUTH FORM A UNITED FRONT.

Day by day, actual practice is bringing forward ever new cases in which the united front of the working class and the toilers is steadily widening and strengthening in the struggle against Fascism. But the thing which is most striking and which it is important to mention is that the youth are showing enormous initiative and activity in this matter. The initiative and activity shown by the Communist Youth in the establishment of a united front with the Socialist Youth organisations meets with the fullest approval of the Comintern and the Y.C.I.

The Communist Parties, on the basis of the conditions of the class struggle in their countries, give every possible support to the Young Communist organisations which are trying to unite the youth in the struggle against capitalism. The Communist

Parties and the Young Communist Leagues are together in this struggle. There are not and could not be any differences between them on the question of the united front, because they are *for* the united front.

This is not the case in the Second International and in the Young Socialist International. The sharpening class struggle and the increasing political activity of the masses played a sorry trick on the leaders of the Second International and the Young Socialist International.

In the majority of the parties of the Second International, and in the leadership of this International, a discussion is now taking place on the united front, i.e., they are talking about whether there is to be a united front or not. But the working class and the toiling masses who are fighting against capitalism are *already* establishing the united front in practice.

The majority on the Executive Committee of the Young Socialist International decided to "await" the decision of the Second International on the united front, fearing to make an outright decision *for or against*. But the most active and revolutionary part of the Socialist Youth, without waiting for the decisions of the Executive Committee of the Young Socialist International, without waiting for permission from the party, are *already* establishing the united front in the struggle for their own economic and political interests, for the interests of the working class against Fascism.

This was obviously bound to raise the question of the relations existing between the Youth organisations and the Socialist Parties. It is equally plain that the Socialist Parties could not remain indifferent to the growing political activity of the youth and to their organisations.

The first Socialist organisation of the youth which approached the Y.C.I. on the question of a joint struggle was the I.L.P. Guild of Youth in Great Britain. The Guild of Youth met with a warm response from the Y.C.I. A working agreement was secured, and the Guild is carrying on a joint struggle, together with the Y.C.L., for the deepening and strengthening of the united front. The leaders of the I.L.P. have not only failed to get so close to the British Communist Party, but, on the contrary, they now demand that the Guild give up the working agreement and its sympathetic affiliation to the Y.C.I., and so weaken the joint struggle with the Y.C.L. against capitalism.

In *Argentina*, in the fires of the class struggle, the Young Socialists understood that any delay in the establishment of the united front would only serve the purposes of the bourgeoisie. They warmly responded to the call of the Y.C.L. for a joint struggle. The Argentine Socialist Party, however, could find no better way of "persuading" the youth than to dissolve the Socialist Youth organisation.

In *France*, as we know, an agreement on the united front was reached both with the Socialist Party and with the Youth organisations. However, those Socialist Youth organisations which were most revolutionary inclined went further than the leaders of the party in the establishment of unity. It is well known that the representatives of the French Young Socialists in the Executive Committee of the Young Socialist International actively supported the proposal at the Plenum to begin negotiations with the Y.C.I. on the united front. The question of the independence of the Youth organisations became a very urgent one in France in direct connection with this,

because the leaders of the Socialist Party, without themselves showing the proper activity in the struggle for the united front, handicapped the initiative of the youth. These disagreements have found outward expression in the fact that the Socialist Youth are more and more beginning to demand independence, "autonomy." It is not impossible that the Socialist Party will adopt Louis Levy's proposal that the rules be "strictly" applied, i.e., attempts will be made "without coercion" to throw out of the leadership and out of the Young Socialist organisation some of those who struggle for the united front not in words but in deeds.

In *Belgium* an agreement was reached on a joint struggle between the leaders of the Y.C.L. and the Socialist Young Guard. We shall write separately of this agreement. However, we may now remark that a campaign was started in the Socialist press against the joint struggle of the Young Guards with the Young Communists. A clear hint was given in the press that it was inadvisable to "dissolve" the Young Guard, but that "proper" measures should be taken in respect of those who have violated discipline.

In other words, those of the Young Guards who have dared to make the first timid and hesitating steps in the establishment of the united front and to express their opinion of those leaders of the Young Socialist International who hinder the establishment of the united front, are now being coerced by the Socialist Party of Belgium to consent to the disruption of the united front.

We can also give similar cases from Switzerland, and if we speak of the Labour Youth who in London,

Lancashire and Surrey condemned the resolution of their party on national defence, then we may include England and some other countries. We will limit ourselves simply to quoting two facts which show how profound and how acute are the disagreements in the Young Socialist International on the question of the united front.

As we know, the Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Y.S.I. in Liege resolved to await the decisions of the Second International on the united front, although the broad masses of the youth are not only voting for the united front but are even establishing it in the struggle against Fascism. This has intensified the disagreements in the Young Socialist International.

In Spain, the united front is being forged out in the fires of the class struggle, and, as we know, the Young Socialists have raised the question of leaving the Young Socialist International. Many organisations of the Young Socialists, particularly that in Granada, voted for leaving the Young Socialist International and joining the Y.C.I.

Walentheim, the president of the Young Socialist organisation of Sweden, who is a bitter enemy of the united front, also raises the question of leaving the Y.S.I. But he raises this question in a different way from that in which it was raised by the leaders of the Spanish Young Socialists. In Spain the question of leaving the Young Socialist International was raised because the majority of the Executive Committee of the Young Socialist International were carrying out the policy of the leaders of the Second International against the united front. In Sweden, the question raised by Walentheim is a threat to leave the Inter-

national in case negotiations are started with the Y.C.I. for a joint struggle.

These facts show that the discussion on the relations between the young and the old generation in the Second International is developing on the basis of different political principles than the Socialist papers are trying to represent.

Differences exist and are becoming keener not so much on the organisational questions as on the question of the principles behind the policy of the Second International and the majority of the members of the Executive Committee of the Young Socialist International.

By their actions, by their growing political activity, the youth are not asking for concessions, but for a *radical change* in the policy of handicapping and disrupting the united front.

THE YOUTH HAVE THE RIGHT TO POLITICAL LIFE.

The most revolutionary part of the Socialist Youth, who at the present time form the Left Wing of the Second International, are demanding the revision of the out-of-date dogmas of the Second International and of its entire policy. One of their chief demands just now is the radical alteration of the reformist definition of the role of the youth in the class struggle and the attitude of the International towards it. In trying to strengthen their weakened influence on the youth, some Socialist leaders write that the time has possibly arrived when the youth can be given the right to "examine and study political problems." Others think that those who put the question in that way are lagging behind real life, because the youth already

have this right, but "there cannot be a special youth policy." Well, we can say to both of them that they are all 25 years behind real life!

This is not at all difficult to prove if we look at the history of the development of the International Socialist Youth movement.

In 1907 in Stuttgart there was an International Congress of the Socialist Youth. Karl Liebknecht played a big role in calling this Congress. It was called *in spite* of the wishes of the Socialist Parties, and during this Congress an attempt was made to unite the Socialist Youth organisations of varying countries into an International of the Youth. The formation of an International of the Youth presupposed the *independent* organisational existence of the youth organisations. The reformists at the time considered that "there was no special youth policy" and that the youth had no business to go into politics. Therefore, they did everything to cut down the rights of the Youth International. They saw to it that not a single Socialist Youth organisation could have independent connections with the International Bureau of Youth. With the help of the opportunist elements inside the Youth movement, the reformists were able right from the start to prevent the proper development of these attempts of the youth to unite on an international scale.

Later, in 1908, German social democracy, which played a prominent role in the Second International, very definitely decided at its Congress in Nuremberg against the formation of *independent* Youth organisations. In the resolutions of the Congress it was decided "to carry out all these tasks without the formation of special Youth organisations, a commission must be formed for work among the youth."

As we know, these tasks were to prevent the youth from taking an active part in the economic struggle of the working class, on the grounds that this was the basis of the trade unions and not of the youth. These tasks were to prevent the youth from taking an active part in politics, on the grounds this was the business of the party. These tasks were to give the youth the "right" to obtain cultural knowledge and to "study political problems."

It can be seen from this that when people do not understand the conditions in which the post-war generations of young toilers developed and took form, when they do not understand the role played by the youth in the class struggle, in the struggle against Fascism and imperialist war, then their arguments are too old and out-of-date. But we are not only concerned with the arguments used by those who oppose the *independence* of the youth, who are now showing great activity in the struggle for the united front. The fact is that while the Fascists are striving, by means of unprecedented demagoguery, by flattery, and also by means of brutal terror, to bring the youth under their influence and to train them in a slavish spirit, people can still be found in the Socialist camp who, instead of activating the youth in the struggle against Fascism, are trying to fetter their activity and restrain them from showing initiative in the class struggle, from establishing the united front.

The Socialist Youth, the most revolutionary part of the Socialist Youth, are now very urgently faced with the choice of either actively participating in the class struggle on the basis of the united front, and consequently of fighting for their independence, for their rights, or else of capitulating to those who are still occupying a waiting position on the question of mobi-

lising the toiling youth and uniting their forces in the struggle against Fascism.

It is precisely for this reason that we should remind the Socialist Youth of what was said many years ago by Lenin, the follower and continuer of the works of Marx and Engels. During the war he wrote in the magazine "International of Youth":—

"It frequently happens that the representatives of the old generation are unable to make a proper approach to the youth, who of necessity approach Socialism in a different way from their fathers, not by the same path, not in the same form and not in the same conditions. Therefore, among other things, we must undoubtedly support the organisational independence of the Youth League, and not only because the opportunists are afraid of this independence, but because of the facts of the case, for without complete independence the youth can neither make themselves into good Socialists nor make preparations to carry Socialism forward."

This is precisely what the Socialist Youth should understand and thoroughly master at the present moment. It will not be difficult for them to do so, for the question of the relations between the old and the young generation have already been solved in a *Leninist* manner in the practice of the Communist International. The Communist Youth organisations are struggling and developing under the leadership of the Communist Parties. We know that the leaders of the Communist Parties do not put restrictions on the initiative of the Communist Youth organisations, but on the contrary, require them to show the greatest possible initiative, activity and energy in the class struggle. The Communist Youth organisations, being organisationally independent, try with great credit to carry out

these demands in the struggle for the united front, in the struggle for the economic and political rights and interests of the toiling youth, for the *cause* of the working class, and they are trying to justify this great *Leninist* confidence in the youth.

We are sure that the revolutionary part of the Socialist Youth, without hesitating at any obstacles and difficulties, will be able independently to understand those disagreements which have arisen in the Young Socialist International and in the Second International. In the class struggle, in the struggle for the united front and for their own independence, they will be able to find the path which will help them to become bold and firm fighters against Fascism, for Socialism, and to cast out of their ranks the Walentheims who try to disrupt the establishment of the united front on behalf of the interests of the bourgeoisie.

**January
1935**

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Send all enquiries
to the Y.C.L., 16
King St., London.

**A NEW
WEEKLY
YOUTH
PAPER**

The Marston Printing Co. (T.U. throughout),
44, Worship Street, London, E.C.2.